

THE DIGNITY OF MAN.

A

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DISCOURSE

Addressed to the Congregation in

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T O
HIS EXCELLENCY
BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, Esq.
P R E S I D E N T
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P E N N S Y L V A N I A;

THE ORNAMENT OF GENIUS,

THE PATRON OF SCIENCE,

AND THE BOAST OF MAN;

THIS DISCOURSE IS INSCRIBED,

With the greatest Deference, Humility and Gratitude,

by his most obliged, and most obedient Servant,

T H E A U T H O R.

Franklin, in Massachusetts,

March 1, 1787.

T O

HIS EXCELLENCY

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, Esq.

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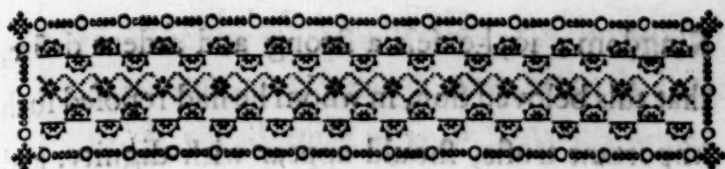
THIS DISCOURSE IS INSCRIBED

TO THE GREAT GENIUS, HUMILITY AND COURTESY

BY THE MOST ELOQUENT AND MOST EMINENT

THE AUTHOR

Published in Philadelphia
at the Press of J. B. Franklin
1757



A
DISCOURSE
ADDRESSED TO THE
CONGREGATION IN FRANKLIN.

1 KINGS II. 2.

Shew thyself a Man.



AVID closed the scene of life, with that propriety of conduct, and that composure of mind, which at once displayed the beauty of religion, and the dignity of human nature. When the time of his departure drew nigh, he had nothing to do to prepare for death, but only, like other pious and illustrious Patriarchs, to converse with his friends, and to give them his last and best advice. And, as he had, some time before, committed to Solomon the care of his Family and government of his Kingdom ;

Kingdom; so he felt a strong and ardent desire, that this beloved Son, in whom he had reposed such important trusts, should appear with dignity, and act a noble and worthy part upon the stage of life. Accordingly he called him into his presence, and with equal solemnity and affection, addressed him in these memorable words, "I go the way of all the earth: be thou strong therefore, and shew thyself a man." This appellation sometimes signifies the dignity, and sometimes the meanness of our nature. Job makes use of it to express our meanness and turpitude in the sight of God. "How can man be justified with God? or how can he be clean that is born of a woman? Behold, even to the moon and it shineth not, yea the stars are not pure in his sight. How much less man that is a worm, and the Son of Man which is a worm." But Isaiah employs this same appellative to represent the dignity of human nature, when he calls upon stupid idolaters to "remember this, and shew themselves men." So here, David in his dying address to Solomon, "shew thyself a man," evidently means to use the term in the best sense, and to urge him to act up to the dignity of his nature, and the end of his being.

AGREEABLY

AGREEABLY therefore to the spirit and intention of the text, the subject which now properly lies before us, is the dignity of man. And, I hope, the observations which shall be made upon this subject, will do honour to our nature in one view, and pour contempt upon it in another, and so lead us all into a clear and just apprehension of ourselves, which is the most useful, as well as the most rare and high attainment in knowledge.

THE dignity of man appears from his bearing the *image* of his Maker. After God had created the heavens and the earth, and furnished the world with a rich profusion of vegetive and sensitive natures, he was pleased to form a more noble and intelligent Creature, to bear his image, and to be the lord of this lower creation. “And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul.” This allows us to say, that man is the offspring of God, a ray from the fountain of light, a drop from the ocean of intelligence. Though, man, since the fall, comes into the world destitute of the *moral* image

image of God, yet, in the very frame and constitution of his nature; he still bears the *natural* image of his Maker. His soul is a transcript of the *natural* perfections of the Deity. God is a spirit, and so is the soul of man; God is intelligence and activity, and so is the soul of man. In a word, man is the living image of the living God, in whom is displayed more of the divine nature and glory, than in all the works and creatures of God upon earth. Agreeably therefore to the dignity of his nature, God hath placed him at the head of the world, and given him the *dominion* over all his works. Hence says the Psalmist, "Thou hast made him a little lower than the Angels, and hast crowned him with glory and honour. Thou madest him to have *dominion* over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: all sheep and oxen, yea the beasts of the field; the fowls of the air; and the fish of the sea." How wide is the kingdom of man! how numerous his subjects! how great his dignity!

God has, besides, instamped a dignity upon man by giving him not only a rational, but an immortal existence. The soul, which is properly

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the man, shall survive the body and live forever. This might be argued from the nature, the capacity, and the desires of the human mind, and from the authority of the wiser Heathens, who have generally supposed the soul to be a spiritual and immortal principle in man. But, since the Heathen Moralists might derive their opinion from a higher source than the light of nature, and since every created object necessarily and solely depends, for continued existence, upon the will of the Creator ; we choose to rest the evidence of this point upon the authority of the sacred Oracles. Here indeed we find the immortality of the soul sufficiently established. Solomon saith, "Who knoweth the spirit of man that goeth upward, and the spirit of the beast that goeth downward to the earth?" And, in another place, after describing the frailty and mortality of the body, he adds, "Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was, and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it." Agreeably to this, our Lord declares that men are able to kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul. And God has told us that he will, at the last day, separate the righteous from the wicked, and fix the latter in a miserable, but the former

in a blessed immortality. Hence immortality appears to be the common property and dignity of the human kind.

THE creatures and objects, with which we are now surrounded, have but a short and momentary being. One species of insects, we are told, begin and end their existence in twenty-four hours. Others live and flutter a few hours longer, and then drop into their primitive dust. The larger animals, which people the air, the earth, and the sea do, day after day, in a thick and constant succession, die and dissolve in their own elements. And even the whole material system will, after a few ages, either by the immediate hand of God, or by the gradual operation of the laws of nature, be rolled together as a scroll, and tumbled into one vast and promiscuous ruin. But *we* shall survive all these ruins and ravages of time, and live the constant spectators of the successive scenes of Eternity. And this renders us infinitely superior, in point of dignity and importance, to all the objects and creatures, whose existence expires with time.

THE dignity of man also appears, from the great attention and regard, which God hath paid to him. God indeed takes care of all his creatures, and his tender mercies are over all his works : But man has always been the favorite child of Providence. God, before he brought him into being, provided a large and beautiful world for his habitation ; and ever since the day of his creation, he has commanded all nature to contribute to his support and happiness. For his good, he has appointed the Sun to rule the day, and the Moon to rule the night. Into his bosom, he has ordered the Earth and the Sea to pour all their rich and copious blessings. And for his use and comfort, he has given the fowls of the mountains, the beasts of the forests, and the cattle upon a thousand hills. He has also given his Angels charge over him, to keep him in all his ways. Accordingly they have appeared from time to time, to instruct him in duty, to deliver him from danger, to bring him good tidings, to attend his dissolution, and to convey his departing spirit to the mansions of rest. But, the most distinguishing and most astonishing display of the divine mercy, is the Incarnation and Death of the Son of God for the salvation

vation of man. By the Incarnation of Christ, our nature was united with the divine, and the dignity of man with the dignity of Christ. Hence all the sufferings, which Christ hath endured on earth, and all the honours, which he hath received in heaven, have displayed the dignity of man. And for the same reason, the dignity of man will be eternally rising, with the rising honour and dignity of Christ.

BUT, we must furthermore observe, that the large and noble capacities of the human mind, set the dignity of our nature in the clearest and strongest light. Let us therefore consider, in this place, several of these with particular attention.

First, MAN hath a capacity for constant and perpetual progression in knowledge. Animals, indeed, appear to have some small degree of knowledge. "The ox knoweth his owner, and the ass his master's crib." But, as all the lower species are destitute of the power of reasoning, or the faculty of arranging and comparing their ideas, so they are totally incapable of enlarging their views, by intellectual improvements. The bee
cannot

cannot improve her skill, nor the ant her prudence, by observation or study. All their knowledge is the mere gift of God, which he bestows upon them without any application or exertion of theirs.

BUT, man is capable of improving in knowledge as long as he enjoys the means or materials of improvement. Indeed he has power to improve the smallest stock forever. The faculty of Reason, with which he is endowed, enables him to proceed from one degree of knowledge to another, in a constant and endless progression. The grounds of this are obvious. As a certain chain, or connection runs through all branches of knowledge ; so the acquisition of one degree of knowledge facilitates the acquisition of another, and the more a man knows, the more he is capable of knowing. And, as all the powers and faculties of the mind brighten and expand by exercise ; so a man's capacity for improvement increases, as the means and thirst for improvements increase. Accordingly the path of knowledge, has resembled the path of the Just, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day. One generation have been improving upon another, from age to age. And
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the improvements and discoveries of the last and present Century are truly surprizing, and justify this grand and bold description,

“ Earth’s disembowell’d, measured are the skies,
 “ Stars are detected in their deep recess,
 “ Creation widens, vanquish’d nature yields,
 “ Her secrets are extorted, art prevails.
 “ What monuments of genius, spirit, pow’r !”

BUT to show that reality in this case surpasses description, let me here mention Solomon, that great man, who is addressed in our text, and whose astonishing improvements in knowledge are recorded by the pen of Inspiration, for the encouragement, as well as the instruction of all future ages. “ And Solomon’s wisdom excelled the wisdom of the East country, and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men : than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol : and his fame was in all nations round about. And he spake three thousand proverbs, and his songs were a thousand and five. And he spake of trees, from the cedar-tree that is in Lebanon, even unto the hyssop that springeth out of the wall ; he spake also of beasts, and of fowls,

fowls, and of creeping things, and of fishes." The children of the East country were the Chaldeans, who, after the flood, made the first advances in Astronomy, Philosophy and other abstruse sciences. Next to them the Egyptians turned their attention to Learning, and soon outrivalled all other nations in literary fame. Solomon therefore surpassed all the Priests and Poets, all the Physicians and Historians, and all the Naturalists, Philosophers, and Astronomers of the two most antient, and most refined nations in the world. What an exalted idea does this exhibit of his wisdom and learning! And, as we must suppose that he made these improvements by reading, by observation, and study; so he stands a lasting ornament of human nature, and a perpetual monument of man's capacity for constant and endless advances in knowledge.

Secondly, MAN hath a capacity for holiness as well as knowledge. The horse and mule which have no understanding, and indeed all the lower animals, are utterly incapable of holiness; and even Omnipotence himself, to speak with reverence, cannot make them holy, without essentially altering the frame and constitution of their natures.

tures." But man is capable of holiness. His rational and moral faculties both capacitate and oblige him to be holy. His perception and volition, in connection with his reason and conscience, enable him to discern and feel the *right* and *wrong* of actions, and the *beauty* and *deformity* of characters. This renders him capable of doing justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God. In a word, this renders him capable of every holy and virtuous affection. And, as he is capable of growing in knowledge, so he is capable of growing in grace, in a constant and endless progression. What a dignity does this give to man, and how near does it place him to principalities and powers above ! This leads me to observe,

Thirdly, THAT man hath a capacity for happiness, equal to his capacity for holiness and knowledge. Knowledge and holiness are the grand pillars which support all true and substantial happiness ; which invariably rises or falls, accordingly as these are either stronger or weaker. Knowledge and holiness in the Deity are the source of all his happiness. Angels rise in felicity as they rise in holiness and knowledge. And saints here below grow in happiness

pinets as they grow in grace, and in the knowledge of holy and divine objects. Of this, we have a beautiful and striking instance in Solomon. View him at the Dedication of the Temple, when he fell upon his knees, and lifted up his hands and his heart to God, and poured into the ear of the divine Majesty the voice of prayer and supplication, the voice of joy, of gratitude and praise. How near did he approach to God ! how high did he rise in felicity ! how much did he anticipate the joys of the blessed ! And, if we now follow him to the Temple above, where his views, his affections, and his joys are incessantly enlarging ; we may form some faint conception of that amazing height, to which man is capable of rising in pure and divine enjoyments. What a vessel of honour and dignity will man appear, when all his capacities for knowledge, for holiness, and for happiness, shall be completely filled ! And to all this we must add,

Fourthly, THAT man hath a capacity for great and noble actions. Of this, we might find numerous monuments, if we had time to survey the land of Shinar, where Babel, Babylon, and Ninevah stood ; or the land of Egypt, where so many

grand and costly Pyramids, Tombs, and Temples were erected ; or the famous cities of Greece and of Rome, where the nobler efforts of human power and genius, have been still more amply displayed. But, the bounds of this discourse will allow us only to mention a few Individuals of our race, who, by their great and noble exertions, have done honour to human nature. Noah, the second Father of mankind, saved the world from total extinction. Joseph preserved two nations from temporal ruin. Moses delivered the People of God from the house of bondage, and led them through hosts of enemies and seas of blood to the land of promise. David settled the kingdom of Israel in peace ; and Solomon raised it to the summit of national glory. Paul, in spite of Pagan superstition, laws and learning, established Christianity in the Heathen world. Luther, by the tongue and pen of controversy, brought about a great and glorious revolution in the christian Church. Newton, by his discoveries in the *material*, and Locke, by his discoveries in the *intellectual* world, have enlarged the boundaries of human knowledge, and of human happiness. And, to name no more, Franklin in the Cabinet, and Washington

Washington in the Field, have given Independence and Peace to America. But greater things than these remain to be done. The kingdom of Antichrist is to be destroyed, the Mahomedans are to be subdued, the Jews are to be restored, the Barbarous nations are to be civilized, the Gospel is to be preached to all nations, and the whole face of things in this world, is to be beautifully and gloriously changed. These things are to be done by the instrumentality of man. And by these, his capacity for great and noble actions, will be still more illustriously displayed. Thus the image, which man bears of his Maker, the immortal spirit which resides within him, the distinguishing favours, which he has received from the Father of mercies, and all his noble powers and faculties, unite to stamp a dignity upon his nature, and raise him high in the scale of Being.

It now remains to make a few Deductions from the subject, and to apply it to the happy occasion of our present meeting.

First, We may justly infer from the nature and dignity of man, that we are under indispensable obligations

obligations to Religion. Our *moral* obligations to religion are interwoven with the first principles of our nature. Our minds are so framed, that we are capable of knowing, of loving, and of serving our Creator; and this lays us under *moral* obligation to worship and obey him. Nor is there one of our race, who is incapable of feeling his *moral* obligations to religion. Only draw the character of the Supreme Being, and describe his power, wisdom, goodness, justice, and mercy, before the most ignorant and uncultivated Savage; and, as soon as he understands the character of God, he will feel that he *ought*, that he is *morally obliged* to love and obey the great Parent of all. He will feel himself under the same *moral* obligation to pay *religious homage* to God, as to speak the truth, or to do justice to man. Every man in the world is capable of seeing that the worship of God is a reasonable service. Religion therefore takes its rise and obligation not from the laws of Politicians, nor from the ignorance and superstition of Priests; but from the immutable laws of nature, and the frame and constitution of the human mind. Hence it is utterly impossible for men wholly to eradicate from their minds all sense of *moral* obligation to religion,

religion, so long as they remain moral agents, and are possessed of common sense.

AND, as man is formed for religion, so religion is the ornament and perfection of his nature. The man of religion is, in every supposable situation, the man of dignity. Pain, poverty, misfortune, sickness and death, may indeed *veil*, but they cannot destroy his dignity, which sometimes shines with more resplendent glory, under all these ills and clouds of life. While the soul is in health and prosperity; while the mind is warmed with holy and religious affections, the man appears with dignity, whether he is in pain, or in sickness, or even in the agonies of death. But, Atheism and Infidelity, with their evil offspring, serve more than all other causes put together, to defile the nature, and sink the dignity of man. This appears from the black description, which the great Apostle Paul has drawn of those nations, who *liked not to retain God in their knowledge*. “ They changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and to four-footed beasts, and creeping things. They changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped

ped and served the creature more than the Creator. They *dishonoured* their own bodies by the most mean and infamous vices. And they became of a *reprobate mind*, being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, without understanding, covenant-breakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful." These are things which defile the nature, and degrade the dignity of man.

AND these too are prejudicial to all learning and mental improvements. These debilitate the mind, cloud the imagination, and cramp all the noble powers and faculties of the soul. These degraded the Alexanders, the Pompeys, and the Cæsars of the world, below the human kind. Had they been influenced by truly virtuous and religious motives, their great exertions would have done honour to human nature, but now they have stained the glory of all flesh. Nay, even a *declension* in religion hath left indelible stains upon the brightest Characters recorded in sacred story; I
mean

mean Noah, David, and Solomon. Solomon was at the height of his glory, when at the height of religion; but when he declined into vice and idolatry, he fell into shame and disgrace, and lost that dignity, which had filled the world with his fame.

Now there is nothing that can wipe off from human nature these blemishes, and restore the dignity of man, but true religion. That charity which seeketh not her own, that love which is the fulfilling of the law, is the essence of religion and the bond of perfection. This cures the mind of Atheism, Infidelity and Vice. This fills the soul with noble views and sentiments, and directs all its powers and faculties to their proper use and end. This exalts the dignity of human nature, and spreads the greatest glory around any human character. This rendered Noah superior to Nimrod, Moses superior to Pharaoh, David superior to Saul, Solomon superior to Socrates, Daniel superior to the wise men of Babylon, and Paul superior to Plato, and all the Sages of the Pagan world. "Happy is the man who findeth *religion*: For the merchandise of it is better than the merchandise of silver, and the gain thereof than fine gold.

gold. She is more precious than rubies; and all the things thou canst desire, are not to be compared to her. Length of days are in her right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour. Her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace. She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her; and happy is the man that retaineth her." Let us all then put on this rich and beautiful ornament, and shew ourselves men.

Secondly, THIS subject may help us to ascertain the only proper and immutable boundaries of human knowledge. I mean such boundaries of our knowledge, as arise from the frame and constitution of our nature, and not from any particular state or stage of our existence. Our rational powers, it is often said, are limited, and therefore all our intellectual pursuits and improvements must be equally limited. This is doubtless true in a certain sense, but not in the sense in which it is generally understood. It appears from what has been observed in this discourse, concerning the powers and faculties of the human mind, that men are capable of making constant and eternal progression in knowledge. The only bounds therefore

therefore that can be set to their intellectual improvements, must be such as have respect to the *kinds*, and not to the *degrees* of their knowledge. There are, indeed, certain *kinds* of knowledge, which men are totally incapable of understanding; but these are only such *kinds* of knowledge, as require more than *created* faculties to understand. For, whatever *kinds* of knowledge any *created* beings are capable of understanding, *men* are also capable of understanding, though with more difficulty, and less rapidity. As Newton knew nothing, which any man is now incapable of knowing, in a certain time, and under certain circumstances; so there is nothing, which any intelligent creatures now know, that men are incapable of knowing, in a given time, and under proper advantages. The truth is, rationality is the same in all intelligent beings. Reason is the same thing in God, in Angels, and in Men. As men therefore bear the *image* of God, in point of Rationality; so they possess all the *rational* powers and faculties, which bear any analogy to the divine intelligence; or, which can be communicated to *created* beings. Accordingly Angels are superior to men in the same sense, and perhaps nearly in

the same degree, that Newton was superior to most of his own species. As Newton had no *rational* power or faculty peculiar to himself; so Angels have no rational powers or faculties which are not common to all intelligent creatures. Every man therefore is capable of learning all that any man, or any intelligent creature has learned, or can learn. Hence the only natural and necessary distinction between Angels and men, and between one man and another is this; that Angels are capable of acquiring knowledge more easily, and more swiftly than men; and some men are capable of acquiring knowledge more easily, and more swiftly than others. And this difference between Angels and men, and between man and man, to whatever cause it may be owing, will probably continue forever; and forever keep up a distinction in their knowledge and improvements for the time being.

Now this being a settled point, we may easily, perhaps, fix the proper boundaries of human knowledge, or determine the proper subjects of human enquiry. It is a caveat given to men, but especially to inquisitive men, not to pry into things

things above their measure. This caveat, undoubtedly, in some cases, may be very proper and necessary; but generally, I imagine, it is not only needless but absurd. For, unless men attempt to pry into things which surpass *created* powers and faculties, I do not know that they transgress the boundaries of human knowledge. There are some things, which, in a moment, we know cannot be understood by *creatures*. And there may be many others, which, by a little attention, we may perceive come under the same predicament. All therefore that Divines and Metaphysicians, as well as Philosophers have to do, in order to know where to *begin*, and, where to *end* their researches, is only to determine whether or not, the proposed subjects require more than *created* abilities to investigate them. If they do require more than *created* abilities, it is vain and absurd to proceed: but if they do not, we have the same grounds to proceed, that men have ever had, to attempt new discoveries.

Thirdly, This subject gives us reason to suppose, that men, in the present state, may carry their researches into the works of nature, much
further

further than they have ever yet carried them. The fields of Science, though they have been long traversed by strong and inquisitive minds, are so spacious, that many parts remain yet undiscovered. There may be therefore room left in Divinity and Metaphysics, as well as in Philosophy and other sciences, to make large improvements. The large and growing capacities of men, and the great discoveries and improvements of the last and present Century, give us grounds to hope, that human learning and knowledge will increase from generation to generation, through all the remaining periods of time. Men have the same encouragements now, that Bacon, Newton and Franklin had, to push their researches further and further into the works of nature. It is, therefore, as groundless, as it is a discouraging sentiment, which has been often flung out, that all the subjects of Divinity, all of human inquiry, are nearly exhausted, and that no great discoveries or improvements, at this time of day, are either to be expected or attempted. The present Generation have superior advantages, which, with capacities no more than equal to their Fathers, may enable them to surpass all who have

have gone before them in the paths of Science. Let this thought rouse their attention, and awaken their exertions, to shew themselves men.

Fourthly, THE observations, which have been made upon the noble powers and capacities of the human mind, may embolden the Sons of Science to aim to be Originals. They are strong enough to go alone, if they only have sufficient courage and resolution. They have the same capacities and the same original sources of knowledge, that the Antients enjoyed. All men are as capable of thinking, of reasoning, and of judging for themselves in matters of Learning, as in the common affairs and concerns of life. And would men of Letters enjoy the pleasures of knowledge, and render themselves the most serviceable to the world, let them determine to think and judge for themselves. Their progress may perhaps, in this way, not be so rapid; yet it will be much more entertaining and useful. When I say their progress may not be so rapid, I mean with respect to those only, who possess moderate abilities; for as to those of superior powers, they will make much swifter progress by going alone out of the common, beaten

beaten track. The way to outstrip those who have gone before us, is not to tread in their steps, but to take a nearer course. What Philosopher can expect to overtake Newton, by going over all the ground, which he travelled? What Divine can expect to come up with Mede, Baxter, or Edwards, while he pursues their path? Or, what Poet can hope to transcend Homer and Milton, so long as he sets up these men as the standards of perfection? If the Moderns would only employ Nature's powers, and converse freely and familiarly with Nature's objects, they might rise above the Antients, and bear away the Palm from all who have gone before them in the walks of Science.

Fifthly, WHAT has been said concerning the nature and dignity of man, shows us, that we are under indispensable obligations to cultivate and improve our minds in all the branches of human knowledge. All our natural powers are so many talents, which, in their own nature, lay us under *moral* obligation to improve them to the best advantage. Being men, we are obliged to act like men, and not like the horse or the mule which
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have no understanding. Besides, knowledge, next to religion, is the brightest ornament of human nature. Knowledge strengthens, enlarges, and softens the human soul, and sets its beauty and dignity in the fairest light. Learning hath made astonishing distinctions among the different nations of the earth. Those nations, who have lived under the warm and enlightening beams of science, have appeared like a superior order of beings, in comparison with those, who have dragged out their lives under the cold and dark shades of ignorance. The Chaldeans and Egyptians, as well as the Greeks and Romans, while they cultivated the arts and sciences, far surpassed, in dignity and glory, all their ignorant and barbarous neighbours. Europe, since the resurrection of Letters in the sixteenth Century, appears to be peopled with a superior species. And the present Inhabitants of North-America owe all their superiority to the Aborigines, in point of dignity, to the cultivation of their minds in the civil and polite arts. Learning has also preserved the Names, Characters, and mighty Deeds of all antient nations from total oblivion. A few learned men in each nation, have done more to spread their national fame,

fame, than all their Kings and Heroes. The boasted glory of Britain is more to be ascribed to her Newtons, her Lockes, and her Addisons, than to all her Kings, and Fleets, and Conquerors.

BUT the cultivation and improvement of the mind is more necessary for use, than for ornament. We were made for usefulness and not for amusement. We were made to be the servants of God, and of each other. We were made to live an active, diligent, and useful life. As men therefore we cannot reach the end of our being, without cultivating all our mental powers, in order to furnish ourselves for the most extensive service in our day and generation. Knowledge and learning are useful in every station; and in the higher and more important departments of life, they are absolutely and indispensibly necessary.

PERMIT me now, therefore, My Hearers, to suggest several things, which may serve to excite you to improve your minds in every branch of useful knowledge, which, either your callings, or your circumstances require.

But not this knowledge.

Experiments:

timents; and, at the same time invites and encourages its highest exertions, with hopes of success and the promises of reward. For, in free Republics, where liberty is equally enjoyed, every man has weight and influence in proportion to his abilities, and a fair opportunity of rising, by the dint of merit, to the first offices and honours of the State.

ANOTHER motive to improvement, you will allow me to say, may be taken from your past singular and laudable efforts to cultivate and diffuse useful knowledge in this place. It is now more than Thirty years, since this single and then small Congregation collected a very considerable Parish-Library, in order to improve their minds in useful and divine knowledge. This was such an effort to promote mental improvements as, I imagine, cannot be easily found in this Country. The benefit of this Library you have all perhaps more or less experienced; and, to its happy influence owe, in a measure, your general Character as a Religious and Intelligent People. May this consideration have all its weight upon you, since our Lord hath said in the Parable of the Talents, "Whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance."

IN this respect, how wonderful the smiles of Providence upon you ! Whose heart doth not glow with gratitude for the auspicious occasion which hath now brought us together ! How great our obligations to God for the unmerited and unexpected Favour of a rich Collection of Books now received, as a mark of Respect of the first literary Character in America, his Excellency President FRANKLIN ! This well chosen and very valuable Library, while it sets the divine kindness in a high and engaging light, lays you under the strongest ties of gratitude to improve the means of cultivating your minds for the service of God and of your fellow-men. Should you second the views of that great Man, and build upon the broad foundation which he has generously laid, you may enjoy ample advantages, in point of Books, to improve your mental powers, and furnish yourselves for usefulness in all your various stations and employments of life. Nor can you neglect or abuse such advantages, without drawing upon yourselves the reproach of the world, and which is infinitely more, the reproach of your own consciences. Be entreated then to improve to the best advantage, every price put into your hands to get wisdom.

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THERE are three grand sources of knowledge before you, Nature, Men, and Books. Attentively read each of these great Volumes.

READ Nature, which is truly an original author. King David, studying this large and instructive volume, which filled his mind with the noblest views and sentiments, broke forth in a rapture of praise, "The heavens declare the glory of God ; and the firmament sheweth his handy work. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night sheweth knowledge."

READ Men. "For as in water face answereth to face, so the heart of man to man." This volume David perused and digested in the Court and Camp of Saul, where human nature, with, and without a veil, was very visible to his critical and discerning eye.

BUT the design of this discourse more directly leads me to urge the reading of Books in particular. These are a grand magazine of knowledge, and contain the Learning and Wisdom of ages. But, you must know, that Books are a peculiar fountain, from whence may be drawn either *sweet* waters or *bitter*, the waters of *life*, or the waters of *death*.

death. For this reason, you will allow me here to advise you, to take heed *how* you read.

AND, in the first place, read with Caution. A person may be undone by a single volume. Nothing contains such secret and fatal poison as Books. Though they profess a kind and friendly intention, yet they often bite like a serpent and sting like an adder. Be careful what books you read. There are many, which the young and inexperienced at least, should totally avoid. In this particular, if you are wise, and faithful to yourselves, you will endeavour to obtain and follow good advice.

READ with Judgment. This is, in every view, indispensibly necessary, in order to read to advantage. This will enable you to discover and ascertain the main object of your Author, which will be a key to all he says in the various parts and branches of his subject. This will help you to distinguish truth from error, good sentiments from bad, and sound reasoning and strict demonstration, from mere conjectures and bold assertions. But if you read without judgment, you will be in danger of imbibing error as well as truth, of always believing the last Author you read, and of never having any fixed and settled sentiments of your own.

READ

READ for Use and not for Amusement. The time is worse than thrown away, which is spent in reading for amusement, without any particular end or object in view. We should be careful how we take up a Book, especially, if it be an entertaining one, with which we have no particular concern; for it will require a considerable effort of the mind to throw it aside, and if we do not throw it aside it will steal away our time, and prevent our being better employed. Almost any book, if read for use, may be of advantage. We may read amusing, and, even corrupting books to advantage, if we read them in order to make a good use of them. The bee can suck honey from the same flowers, from which other insects suck poison. But we may read all our lives to very little purpose, if we read every book which happens to fall in our way for amusement and not for use. We should always read with reference, either to our own particular profession, or to the particular state and situation of our own minds. When we read with either of these objects in view, we shall be apt both to understand and digest what we read. There is great and singular advantage in reading proper books at a proper time, when we really stand in need of them. This is

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of the same happy tendency, as eating and drinking at the proper seasons, when it serves to nourish and strengthen, instead of clogging and surfeiting the body.

READ with Patience. Many Authors are both prolix and obscure in conveying their ideas; and after all, have much more chaff than wheat in their writings. In reading such, we must go over a great deal of ground in order to reap a small harvest of ideas. It is difficult, however, for any man to treat any subject in a method entirely new. We must expect therefore to find many common and familiar thoughts in every Author, which we must patiently read, if we would *properly* come at those which are more new, entertaining and instructive. And for this reason it is generally best perhaps, if Authors are of any tolerable size, to read them through, with patience and attention. This is but justice to them, and prudence to ourselves.

READ with Confidence. In our first essays after knowledge, we are obliged, by the laws of our nature, to depend upon the assistance and instruction of others, and in consequence of this, we are apt to feel, through life, too great a sense of our own weakness and imbecility, and to despair of going a

step

step farther than we are led. This, however is very unfriendly to all improvement by reading. We ought therefore to feel that we are men, and place a proper degree of confidence in our own strength and judgment. We ought to fix it in our minds that we are capable of improvement. Such a confidence in ourselves as this, will embolden us to read with a view not only of understanding, but of improving upon the Authors we read. Very few Authors have exhausted the subjects upon which they have treated, and therefore have generally left us ample room to improve upon what they have written. And by reading with this view, if we fail of improving upon those we read, we shall, however, more clearly and fully understand *their* meaning, and more thoroughly make *their* ideas and sentiments our own.

YET, at the same time, every one should read with Humility. Reading, more than any other method of improvement, is apt to puff up the mind with pride and self-conceit. For, persons of reading are very prone to estimate their knowledge more according to the number of books which they have read, than according to the number of ideas which they have collected and digested.

ed. And so are ready to imagine, that they have engrossed to themselves all knowledge; though, in reality, they have not read enough, to learn their own ignorance. This should teach us to take the Poet's advice.

"A little learning is a dangerous thing:

"Drink deep, or taste not the Pierian spring.

"There shallow draughts intoxicate the brain;

"And drinking largely sobers us again."

NOR is pedantry peculiar to those only, who begin to read and study late in life; for it is too often found among those, who have enjoyed a regular and liberal education. Do not Physicians and Attorneys, by reading a few books in Divinity, sometimes fancy themselves masters of that sacred and sublime science? And, on the other extreme, do not Divines, by reading a few books in Law and Physic, sometimes fancy themselves masters of those two learned professions? But this is rank pedantry. It is an easy matter to gain a superficial acquaintance with the general objects of science; but it is a laborious task to acquire a deep and thorough acquaintance with any single branch of knowledge. It is easy to know *something* about *every thing*; but it is difficult to know *every thing*

about *any thing*. If men of reading would collect the whole stock of their knowledge, and the whole force of their genius more to a point, and aim to be complete masters of their own professions; they would become at once, much less pedantic, and much more useful to the world. Many men of real abilities and learning, have defeated their own usefulness, by attempting to know, and to do too much.

IN the last place, read *prayerfully*. "If any of you lack wisdom, says the Apostle, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him." This Solomon found to be true, by happy experience. "In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night; and God said, Ask what I shall give thee. And Solomon said, Thou hast shewed unto thy servant David my father great mercy, according as he walked before thee in truth, and in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with thee; and thou hast kept for him this great kindness that thou hast given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. And now, O Lord my God, thou hast made thy servant king instead of David my father; *and I am but a child; I know not how to go out or come in.* And thy servant is in
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the midst of thy people which thou hast chosen, a great people that cannot be numbered nor counted for multitude. *Give therefore thy servant an understanding heart*; to judge thy people, that I may discern between good and bad: for who is able to judge this thy so great a people? *And the speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing.* And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies, but hast asked for thyself *understanding* to discern judgment; behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee *a wise and understanding heart.*" It was Dr. Doddridge, I think, who never used to take up a new book to read, without an ejaculatory prayer for divine influence and direction. This example is worthy of universal imitation. Let us therefore always accompany our essays after knowledge with a humble and prayerful spirit; and then we may hope to read and study with safety and success.

To all these directions, I might now add, Diligence and Perseverance, which always have had, and always will have, a mighty influence, in all the great things done by mankind. But I shall only
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add a few words to those, who are very immediately and deeply interested in the things which have been said in this discourse.

THIS subject calls upon Parents in particular, to shew themselves men. You are, my respectable Hearers, men in years, be men also in virtue, in religion, and in understanding. Let the dignity of man appear in all your conduct, and especially in your conduct towards your children. Let them see the dignity of human nature exemplified before their young and attentive minds. They are every day, and every hour, watching your conduct, and looking up to you for example and instruction. Take heed, that none of your words, none of your actions, none of your pursuits, be unworthy of men. But, let all your conversation and behaviour be such as your children may follow with propriety, with safety, and dignity. And while you are teaching them by example, teach them also by precept. Give them good instruction; and for this purpose, provide them good instructors. These are of great importance to your children, whose progress in knowledge, will generally bear a very exact proportion to the abilities and fidelity of their Teachers. The education of children has always been

been an object of great attention among all wise nations, and especially among all wise and good Parents. Let this then be the object of your attention. Consider the dignity of man. Consider the worth of the soul. Consider the rich and invaluable treasure put into your hands. Consider how much the dignity and happiness of your children both in time and in Eternity, depend upon your care and fidelity. And let the ties of nature, the authority of God, and your own solemn vows, engage you to bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and to cultivate and embellish their opening minds in every branch of useful and ornamental knowledge. Admit not the thought, that such little, such weak, and to appearance, such useless creatures, are of small importance; but remember that they are men in miniature, and may, one day, surprize the world with their dignity. When a young Prince is born, all the Kingdom feel the importance of his education, and are anxiously concerned to have the ablest instructors employed, to form him for great and noble actions. But you have more than Princes, even young Immortals, committed to your care, whose powers and capacities, whose dignity and importance, will astonish you, at the great Day, if not

not before. How happy will that parent be, who shall then be found to have been faithful to his children ! “ He will then join, as a celebrated Writer observes, his virtuous offspring in the habitations of the just, and there see them rise up and call him blessed. But if a parent neglects his duty to his children ; if he sets before them an example of irreligion, and suffers them to grow up loose and unprincipled, he may expect that their blood will be required at his hands, and he should tremble to think of that period of retribution, when probably they will curse him for that negligence which has ruined them.”

Finally, LET this subject awaken the attention of the Youth, to the dignity of their nature and the end of their being. My dear young Friends, you will soon be called to act your various parts upon the stage of life. You are now the Hope of your Parents, of your Pastors, and of your Country. The eyes of the world are upon you. Be entreated then to cultivate all your noble powers, and to shew yourselves men, in whatever departments of life, divine Providence shall place you. Piety and Knowledge will prepare you for a useful and honourable life, and for a peaceful
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and triumphant death. Let these then be the supreme objects of your pursuit. Early consecrate all your time and all your talents to the service of God, and of your fellow-men. Seek for knowledge, as for silver, and search for it, as for hid treasures; and sacrifice every object which obstructs your pursuit of it. "Through desire a man having *separated himself*, says Solomon, seeketh and intermeddleth with all wisdom." If you would make progress in learning, and rise to any distinguishing degrees of knowledge, you must separate yourselves from the vanities of youth, and devote those vacant hours to mental improvements, which, too many of your age trifle away in folly and vice. In particular, flee youthful lusts, which war against both the body and the mind. Shun that all-devouring monster, Intemperance, by which so many *strong minds* have been cast down and destroyed. Avoid bad company and unmanly diversions, which are an inlet to every vice. Hold in steady contempt, *Beaus* and *Fops*, those butterflies which live upon the filth and dregs of the earth. Diogenes walking the streets of Athens at noon-day with a lanthorn in his hand; and being asked, as he intended to be, what he was searching after, tartly replied, "I am
looking

looking for Men." A severe satire upon the luxury and effeminacy of that once manly and virtuous People. The dignity of man appears in the ornaments of the mind, and not in those of the body. Seek therefore to adorn and embellish your minds both by reading and observation, and your gifts and abilities will make room for you, and bring you before great men. You have peculiar advantages and encouragements to animate you to great and noble exertions. *Therefore set your Mark of intellectual attainments as high as you please, and, according to the common course of events, you will, by uniformity, diligence, and perseverance, infallibly reach it.* Your generous Benefactor hath set you an example, as well as given you the means of intellectual improvements. That Great Man, in the morning of life, was surrounded with uncommon difficulties and embarrassments, but by the mere dint of genius and of application, he surmounted every obstacle thrown in his way, and by his rapid and astonishing progress in knowledge, he hath risen, step by step, to the first offices and honours of his Country, hath appeared with dignity in the Courts of Britain and of France, and now fills more than half the globe with his Fame. Keep this illustrious example in your eye, and shew yourselves men.

